New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1956

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Ponder Heart"

Daily Mirror

February 17, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'The Ponder Heart' Needs a Stimulant

• David Wayne gives it a big lift, but even his talent can't carry it.

When Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov read Eudora Welty's story, "The Ponder Heart," it must have seemed an excellent idea for an amusing and touching play. Fields and Chodorov are expert craftsmen. They know good material when they come across it, and they are usually successful in fashioning it into hits.

But, in this instance, they have been thwarted by Miss Welty's account of an amiable and ineffectual Southern eccentric tried for and acquitted of the murder of his young and mentally retarded bride. Both have lived in worlds of their own. Quite normal where they are concerned, but cockeyed as the dickens to strangers.

• • •

UNCLE DANIEL PONDER delighted in providing simple pleasures for those about him. He enjoyed their reactions to his generosity. So one day he decided on a "trial marriage" with a wispy young popcorn purveyor, who thought that wedded bliss was comprised solely of buying washing machines, TV sets and frigidaires for an old house without electricity.

Eventually, big-hearted Uncle Daniel installed current so that his child bride could see the gimmicks really work, and a lightning bolt hit the living room. Everyone in town knew that Bonnie Dee Ponder's weak heart succumbed to fright. Except her simple-minded family and a lawyer who needed to win a good case to further his political ambitions.

Uncle Daniel is delightfully etched by David Wayne, who was charming as the wily and unorthodox Sakini in "Teahouse of the August Moon." He is so completely likable and honest in his peculiar way that we can't help doubting that his fellow townsmen ever permitted him to be indicted for a murder he didn't commit.

• • •

SARAH MARSHALL, Una Merkel, Juanita Hall, Don Hanmer, Will Geer, John Marriott, John McGovern, Donald Foster and Ruth White are outstanding in other roles, getting a lot of mileage from the frail vehicle contrived for them by Fields and Chodorov.

The Playwrights' Company must have spent a sizable sum on the production. There are atmospheric and costly settings by Ben Edwards, and Robert Douglas has been brought on from Hollywood's film studios to do the staging. This august organization has certainly given the new arrival at the Music Box the best of everything.

Yet, "The Ponder Heart," for all its virtues, comes alive too seldom for a Main Stem click. It is at its best in the third stanza, with Wayne, as Uncle Daniel, driving judge and attorneys crazy with his obfuscating attempts to clarify legal procedure. He is heartwarming and human. There was never any question in our mind but what the jury would render the right verdict.

It is always regrettable to have to say "almost but not quite" about a worthy try. Still, a miss is as good as a mile, even though it be a near miss, in a present-day theatre that demands nothing less than perfection.

"THE PONDER HEART"

Comedy by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov; adapted from the story by Eudora Welty; staged by Robert Douglas; scenery and lighting by Ben Edwards; costumes by Frank Spencer; presented by the Playwrights Company at the Music Box Theatre, February 16, 1956. The cast:

Jacob.....Theodore Browne
Sarah.....Vinnie Burrows
Mr. Springer.....David Leland
Edna Earle Ponder...Una Merkel
De Yancey Clanahan..Don Hammer
Big John.....John Marriott
Narciss.....Juanita Hall
Purdel Peacock...Edwin Buckley
Bruce Peacock...Richard Klein
Treva Peacock..Helen Quarrier
Johnnie Ree Peacock.....
Jeanne Shelley
Mr. Peacock.....Harold Grau
Mrs. Peacock...Charlotte Klein
Eloise.....Barbara Jean Gilliam
Uncle David Ponder..David Wayne
Dorrit R. Gladney.....Will Geer
Bonnie Dee Ponder.....
Sarah Marshall
Sam.....Noel Williams
Rodney.....Johnny Klein
Willie.....Junior Marshall
Teacake Magee.....Ruth White
Judge Waite.....John McGovern
Dr. Eubanks.....Donald Foster
Truex Bodkin...Dwight Marfield
Mrs. Bodkin.....Mary Farrell
Al.....J. Talbot Holland
Clyde.....William Dwyer
Clerk.....James Karr
Bailiff.....Tony Kraber
Foreman.....Alan Manson

New York Post

February 17, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Courtroom Play With a Difference

Until the third act at the Music Box last night, "The Ponder Heart" worried me a little. The dramatization by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov of Eudora Welty's novel certainly hadn't been lacking in character humor, but there were things in it I found disturbing. In the all-important final section, however, it went into a rural Southern courtroom for a murder trial, at which point it paradoxically became so warmly and outlandishly comic that all my doubts were quickly removed and it was clear that I was seeing one of the funniest and most engaging of the season's comedies.

Let me try to explain immediately my slightly delayed appreciation. Even in the first two acts, "The Ponder Heart" was brightened by a fresh and consistent vein of mad humor and a group of amiably insane comic characters who were as likable as they were eccentric and original. There was surely nothing wrong about all this. But there was something about the relationship of the two central figures, an innocently quixotic Southern gentleman and his feeble-minded child bride, which seemed to contain a hint of pathological overtones verging on the uncomfortable.

The Trial

I was afraid I was going to be right, too, when the child bride died during the course of a very literal electric storm at the end of the second act. But please don't go away. In the last act, the husband, the guileless and scatterbrained Daniel Ponder, is on trial under the suspicion of having killed the poor, brainless child, and the entire episode is oddly, wildly and delightfully comic. The utter nonsense of the courtroom procedure, with Uncle Daniel's simple innocence throwing a bright light of honesty on the proceedings, is quite enchantingly entertaining.

It is not merely that the contrast between the candid simplicity of the man on trial and the despairing attempt at courtroom gravity is pleasantly satirical, although it assuredly is. It is also that the play thereupon develops an endearing quality of wild and imaginative humor that is not far from irresistible. There is no bothering with suspense. You never have any doubt that Uncle Daniel is going to be acquitted with acclamation. But in the process there is so much sheer fun that it will be hard to take a courtroom play seriously for a long time.

David Wayne

One of the things most right about "The Ponder Heart" is, naturally, David Wayne's performance in the title role. It is he who, even before the final act, wards off the potentially pathological perils by his humorously charming portrayal of the simple-minded gentleman who marries the imbecilic girl out of the sunniness of his innocent heart, cherishes her tenderly but unsuccessfully, sees her die in his arms and faces trial on an absurd charge of murder with gallantry and an utter unawareness of any danger. As usual, Mr. Wayne is very close to perfection.

There are other excellent performances, also. Sarah Marshall makes the poor little bride both believable and pathetic, Una Merkel is admirable as Uncle Daniel's loyal and troubled niece, and there are fine characterizations by Don Hanmer as his exasperated attorney, Will Geer as a folksy and baffled prosecutor, John McGovern as a long suffering judge, and, in smaller roles, by John Marriott, Juanita Hall, Donald Foster, Jeanne Shelley and J. Talbot Holland. It is rather a curious comedy, this play called "The Ponder Heart," and it ends in a blaze of hilarity.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 17, 1956

Music Box Bills 'Ponder Heart'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There is a vagrant new bit of folklore at the Music Box called "The Ponder Heart."

The comedy has charm which occasionally slips over into archness.

In fact, it is a good deal like the confectioners' dummies you see sometimes at weddings. There is so much more icing than there is cake. The truth is, "The Ponder Heart," for all its attractions, is not about anything much.

The aging playboy of a Southern village marries a pretty moron, and she dies of fear in his arms during a thunderstorm after he has pulled her out from under a sofa to comfort her.

Trial for Murder.

The whole third act, nearly half the play, concerns his trial for murder.

The tongue-in-cheek ironies of the trial might have been enchanting if anything were at stake. But there is no earthly reason to suspect Uncle Daniel Ponder of killing his child bride. Consequently the erratic nature of the proceedings grows tiresome.

What you end up with is a great many "characters," operating on the small-town privilege of being themselves.

Witnesses sass the attorneys. The defendant strolls out for a walk to wake up his foot. Later he fires his lawyer and demands that the district attorney question him.

Strange Generosity.

For very little reason, he ends up giving away all the money that has let him be a generous zany all his life.

Yet the play is by no means without inventiveness.

There is the pathetic and funny picture of the vague youngster who does not want to be married, yet is charmed by an endless stream of machines — washer, refrigerator and television—in a house which has no electricity.

A flavorsome moment shows the young mistress playing jacks on the living room floor with the family maid to see who will make the beds.

Through it all scurries the flighty, bright-eyed figure of David Wayne as Uncle Daniel. Once you have seen Mr. Wayne in a role, it is immediately impossible to imagine anyone else playing it. Once again this is the case, and you only wish he had more substantial material.

Child Bride.

Sarah Marshall is lovely and elfin as the child bride. She indulges in no tricks, and is both ludicrous and touching. Yet one wonders if the play would not have gained starch with a more deliberate and sophisticated attack on this role.

Una Merkel is a delight as the long-suffering Ponder sister, and Don Hanmer and Will Geer share honors as the lawyers. Some of the play's most authentic and pointed moments come from Juanita Hall's portrayal of a family retainer.

Ben Edwards' sets give the play the air of a bright dream.

DAILY NEWS

February 17, 1956

'The Ponder Heart' Disarming, Daffy and Definitely Delightful

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Uncle Daniel Ponder is a Confederate twin of Denver's Elwood P. Dowd—a warmly friendly fellow who wants everybody to have as pleasant a time as he is having, and who isn't even irritated when somebody wants to put him in the crazy-house just because he is easygoing. Uncle Daniel's play, "The Ponder Heart," was produced by the Playwrights' Company at the Music Box last evening, and in its gentle southern way it is as screwy a play as Elwood Dowd's "Harvey" was. It never did happen, probably, and it never could happen, positively—but all the same it seems to happen at the Music Box, and to me it is enchanting.

At the beginning, Uncle Daniel Ponder, a rich and middling-aged resident of a small town not far from Mississippi, is coming up for trial on the charge of having murdered his bride. Nobody has bothered to put him in jail because everybody knows he wouldn't hurt anybody. His bride, it soon becomes known, was a girl named Bonnie Dee Peacock—a barefoot lass whom the old rake trapped into marriage by getting her drunk on pistachio ice cream and giving her a solid gold wedding ring from a box of Cracker-jack. She was, we are informed, the kind of girl who could spend hours trying to figure out how the tail of the C gets through the L on the Coca-Cola sign.

The Daffiness Begins

At this point, being an addict of daffiness, I decided to settle back in my Music Box chair last evening and enjoy whatever came my way. A great deal came my way, and almost all of it was gently and beautifully funny. I saw Uncle Daniel taking his bride to his big house for a trial marriage—the trial being that he wouldn't offer any intimacies for 90 days. I saw Bonnie Dee reading the magazine ads and ordering everything she wanted—refrigerators, dishwashers, a TV and so on. I heard the big colored maid (played charmingly by Juanita Hall) sigh, "I sure wish we had some electricity."

Finally we got to the murder trial. Bonnie Dee was literally scared to death by a lightning storm, but an ambitious district attorney tried to pin the rap on Uncle Daniel, who is usually called Dear Heart by his middle-aged niece. In improbability, this murder trial gets close to "Alice in Wonderland," what with Uncle Daniel applauding the district attorney whenever he makes a point. The judge himself, smoking a cigar and with his feet on the bench, has to admit, "I've never seen the likes of this in all my jurisprudence."

Softens the Heart

"The Ponder Heart" is a whimsey by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, based on a story by Eudora Welty. It does need a bit of trimming in the trial scene, but generally speaking it is disarmingly warm-hearted and captivatingly funny, and not like any other comedy you can find.

It also is disarmingly and captivatingly acted. David Wayne's geniality as Uncle Daniel would soften the hardest heart, and his skill as an actor is uncanny. The find of the evening is Sarah Marshall, who plays the barefoot Bonnie Dee; hers is a miraculously amusing, straight-faced performance.

In the large company there are many other well-done character parts—Una Merkel, trying to be sensible as Uncle Daniel's niece (she runs a ratty hotel and proudly boasts, "It's a Duncan Hines"); John Marriott, as a colored handyman who won't even move until he is given a dime; Will Geer, as a snarling D. A.; Don Hanmer, as a baffled young attorney; John McGovern, as an even more baffled judge, and Ruth White, in the role of a social leader named Teacake McGee.

There are a couple of excellent settings by Ben Edwards, and Robert Douglas must have enjoyed as much relish in directing this offbeat comedy as I had last evening watching it.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
February 17, 1956

THEATER

'The Ponder Heart'

By WALTER F. KERR

EVERY once in a while during the recklessly charming new comedy at the Music Box, David Wayne pauses long enough to announce that he is happy as a mockin'-bird and that he just wishes he could sing. I thought he sang real nice.

Mr. Wayne is playing a dapper old coot with quite a few odd passions. He is fond of red bow ties, striped blue shirts, shiny white shoes, and yellow-haired girls who like pistachio ice-cream. As Uncle Daniel Ponder in "The Ponder Heart," Mr. Wayne has brushed a carton or so of white powder into his hair, glued on some oversize eyebrows, and agreed to impersonate the town's oldest, wealthiest, most talkative and most improvident citizen.

• • •

But he isn't out to show off his knack for character acting, his ability to creak about the stage convincingly. He seems to have a notion that the easygoing irresponsible who lives in the best house on the hill is the youngest and silkiest upstart in the South, and he turns the play's lines to butter—the very best butter—as he sweeps off his hat in a gallant bow and glides like a dragon-fly across a sunlit stage.

He is perfectly able, when the time comes, to stand stock still in horror at the news that his idiot young wife has left him. He has a sobering note to sound when he rises, fiercely injured, in a courtroom that is bent on trying him for murder. But most of the time he is smiling, just barely keeping his footwork short of a clog. Mr. Wayne performs as lightly and easily as if he'd just drifted down off a cottonwood tree.

• • •

And "The Ponder Heart," as a play, is as errant and wispy and filled with the wanderlust as its principal character. Adapted by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov from a celebrated Eudora Welty short-story, it plays hob with quite a few conventions. Its mood is almost a shrug; its most serious passages have a ripple of cracker-barrel shiftlessness and corner-store humor about them; though the time is the present, the stage insists on looking as much as possible like something left over from Currier and Ives.

• • •

No one is quite serious about the folk habits of the South, even if the plot does call for a lightning-bolt that rips through a doorway and shatters a few lives. Nor are we committed to farce, even if a new bride keeps her shoes in the icebox and drops to her knees to play jacks with the family maid. A gentle, wry, unpredictable chuckle is what the authors seem to be after, and they got an almost uninterrupted one from me.

The images are fresh: a spate of children crawling all over a small-town witness stand, a defendant congratulating his prosecutor on his prowess, a delighted witness insisting on telling the plot of "Quo Vadis" to her stunned interrogators. Let the action ramble, let the plotting climb trees, let some of the scenes go on too long for their own good—the impudent grin that shines through the nonsense is still remarkably winning.

• • •

The cast has caught the hang of the thing with surprising uniformity. Una Merkel stubbornly defends her wayward uncle with a warm tenacity; Will Geer summons Shakespeare to a murder trial with greasy aplomb; Juanita Hall speaks her mind with a snappish irrelevance; Don Hanmer throws up his hands in understandable despair as his client insists on instructing a judge. And Sarah Marshall is quite a picture as the pigeon-toed lass who has been given all the prizes in the Cracker-Jox boxes, including a wedding ring. Miss Marshall looks like a backwoods Betsy von Furstenberg (I know that sounds frightening, but it's fairly accurate) and she is enough of a cartoon to keep the odd balance between absurdity and sudden sorrow in theatrical working-order.

I don't know whether or not box-office lightning is going to strike "The Ponder Heart." It's offbeat and tenuous and dramatically impertinent. But, like Mr. Wayne, it has a bubbling spirit beneath its lazy graces.

Journal American
February 17, 1956

Stars Good, Plot Thin!

David Wayne, Una Merkel and Will Geer Stand Out in Whimsey

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT IS ONE THING to write a gentle whimsey for an enlightened magazine audience, and it is quite another thing to bring these characters to life on the stage. That is what Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov endeavored to achieve from a short story by Eudora Welty.

As "The Ponder Heart," it was presented by the Playwrights' Co. at the Music Box Theatre last night.

A large cast and careful production have combined to give this a momentous pitch. David Wayne has never been more ingratiating in the lead; Una Merkel is engaging in a supporting role, and Will Geer has a full field day as an ambitious district attorney in a small cracker community.

But the plot wears thin. We see what's coming down the pike, and we don't much care.

A Bungler

Wayne, the beloved and bungling scion of a rich family, has chosen at a late stage in his life to marry the imbecilic daughter of a poor neighbor. She is many years his junior, there are various complications about the marriage, and when she is found dead after a thunder storm he is improbably brought to trial for her murder.

The entire effort is a study of Daniel Ponder, the beguiling Wayne character, and it must be agreed that it nearly comes off.

This is a man who has joyfully allowed his bride to fill his house with electrical appliances, although the premises have not been wired; who floats in a happy haze when she fails to show up for the party celebrating their first three months of marriage; who later congratulates the district attorney for scoring heavy points against him when he is on trial for his life.

I couldn't quite go along with it. I never believed the premise or the subsequent exposition. One is apt to wind up with the conclusion that everybody is too far off the beam to bear further consideration. The line between straight farce and believable comedy is too often crossed.

This is not to minimize David Wayne's charming contribution to the evening, nor the effective services of Sarah Marshall, daughter of Herbert Marshall, in her first important venture on Broadway as the child bride.

Whatever becomes of the venture she will remain as one of the most primitive and arrested young Southern ladies since Jeeter Lester's kinfolk were operating hereabouts.

"The Ponder Heart" doesn't appear to have made up its mind. It has charm and recurrent brilliance, but is neither crazy enough nor funny enough for the big score.

The New York Times
February 17, 1956

Theatre: Comedy of Rural Manners

Music Box Welcomes 'The Ponder Heart'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

BETWEEN the novel and the play nothing essential has been lost. "The Ponder Heart," which opened at the Music Box last evening, is original, charming and funny.

At first it was a novel about the South, told by Eudora Welty in a style that would seem to be allergic to the stage. For the novel, told in the person of Edna Earle Ponder, was subjective; and the sweet personality of the teller seemed to be more ingratiating than the harum-scarum story.

Inevitably the play is objective. But somehow Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov have managed to recapture the friendly tone of the novel. David Wayne, who plays the part of Uncle Daniel Ponder, is at the top of his form; he is guileless, sociable and winning. As Edna Earle Ponder, Una Merkel brings into the play the selfless affection that made the novel so pleasant and refreshing. Everything essential has been retained.

Strictly speaking, Uncle Daniel Ponder must be a whack. He doesn't seem able to deal with the realities of the world. But his variance from the norm is similar to that of the disarming draftee from the South in "No Time For Sergeants." He likes people and wants everybody to be happy.

You probably remember from the novel how he marries a little backwoods girl. Everyone in town knows that the marriage is a mistake. But Uncle Daniel does not think so. Out of the wealth his father left him he buys her everything pretty in the advertisements—electric refrigerator, washer, dishwasher, television, toaster, sun lamps, despite the fact that he has no electricity in the house.

•

To tell the truth, the first two acts of the play proceed without much momentum. Everything is comic; everything is delightful in itself. But the play lacks the buoyancy of the novel. It is not until "The Ponder Heart" settles down in the courtroom that its full quality appears and the eccentricity and the humor are perfectly blended.

You will no doubt remember that Uncle Daniel's bride dies during a terrible lightning storm, and that Uncle Daniel, of all people, is charged with murder. It is in the courtroom that the authors of the play, the actors and Robert Douglas, the director, become really triumphant.

•

From every point of view the trial is a caricature of the solemnity of due process. Uncle Daniel, overflowing with goodwill and hospitality, cannot help complimenting the prosecuting attorney for stating the case against him so eloquently. Uncle Daniel, who loves to talk, constantly interrupts, and the witnesses refuse to conform to rules that they find disagreeable. Even the jury rebukes the prosecutor when he departs from the accepted social usages.

But the play does not hold the characters up to ridicule. It respects their loyalty to the town and each other. Although they are temperamental, they are neighbors. Although the courtroom scene is uproarious, it is enchanting, also. Will Geer's homely histrionics as the prosecuting attorney, Don Hanmer's anxiety as Uncle Daniel's sorely tried attorney, John McGovern's comic vexation as the judge, Ruth White's rebelliousness as a witness whose dignity as a social leader has been affronted, Juanita Hall's anger as one of the witnesses and John Marriott's invincible taciturnity as another—all contribute to the comic shambles of the scene.

•

But the acting is excellent all the way through. As the timid, colorless, backward bride, Sarah Marshall's shiftlessness and innocence compose a full-length portrait. Miss Merkel and Mr. Wayne are the actors whose taste and daintiness give the comedy its distinctiveness and keep it on the level of a comedy of rural manners—absurd but admirable, also. They do not go after easy laughs. They respect the characters they are playing. What is absurd in the parts they forgive because it derives from goodness.

Ben Edwards chronicles the indolent good will of the town in his lazy settings. Over the whole work, Mr. Wayne presides with an expansive heart, a cheerful nature, devotion to his friends, soothing speech and flowing gestures. It's funny and delightful. It also includes some forgiving truth about unpretentious people.

"A Streetcar Named Desire"

The New York Times
February 16, 1956

The Theatre: 'Streetcar' Is Revived

Miss Bankhead Heads City Center Cast

By BROOKS ATKINSON

TALLULAH BANKHEAD and Blanche duBois are not evenly matched in Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire," which was acted at the City Center last evening.

Blanche is the fragile Southern lady who can no longer face realities and is reaching the end of a dark road. But no one has a clearer idea of what she is doing than Miss Bankhead, who has entertained audiences for years with her brash humors, her animated acting and her startling voice. Miss Blanche and Miss Bankhead do not have much in common, and casting Miss Bankhead in the part of a fading, lingering, tragic belle is what is known in the trade as "playing against it."

•

There may be a scene or two when Miss Bankhead expresses something of the loneliness of a woman rejected by the world. For instance, the scene in which Blanche tells Mitch the terrible story of the marriage that led to disaster: Miss Bankhead plays that with something of the remembered horror that Mr. Williams wrote into the episode.

But Miss Bankhead has a personality that cannot be masked easily. It is a personality that is antipathetic to Blanche duBois. It is worldly and sophisticated, decisive and self-sufficient; it is fundamentally comic. Last night the audience seemed to be familiar with all her mannerisms, and was disposed to regard Blanche's tussle with the fates as pretty funny. The audience was doing Miss Bankhead an injustice. But the injustice was only a matter of degree. For Miss Bankhead was playing an introspective tragedy in the style of melodrama.

•

Granted that the City Center production is not the equal of the original production with Jessica Tandy, Marlon Brando, Karl Malden and Kim Hunter, it has its moments. For "A Streetcar Named Desire" is a play that is both ruthless and sensitive with depth and background, with insight into baleful truths.

Some of the scenes re-create a good deal of the vitality of the story. Gerald O'Loughlin's crude, impulsive Stanley Kowalski is nicely matched with Frances Heflin's wholesome Stella Kowalski. And their scenes together are moving. In his direction, Herbert Machiz has preserved the primitive relationship that exists between these two people. The acting is admirable.

And Rudy Bond, as Mitch, is also excellent. Cautious, naïve, essentially proper in his sense of middle-class decorum, Mr. Bond brings that interesting part to life. With Lou Gilbert acting a spirited yet squalid Pablo Gonzales, the poker scene is vividly portrayed, including the explosive scuffle that concludes it.

•

As a sketch of people caught up in a painful crisis that cannot be resolved, "A Streetcar Named Desire" is an extraordinary threnody, poetic in design and penetration. But the fabulous vitality of Miss Bankhead's style of acting has nothing to do with the neurotic terrors of Blanche duBois. Life is still too overwhelming for poor Blanche. In this case, it is the natural gusto of Tallulah Bankhead that crushes her.

"A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE"

Revival of play by Tennessee Williams; staged by Herbert Machiz; settings and lighting by Watson Barratt; based on original designs by Jo Mielziner; presented by the New York City Theatre Company (Jean Dalrymple, Director) at the New York City Center, February 15, 1956. The cast:

Negro Woman.. Vinnette Carroll
Eunice Hubbel..... Jean Ellyn
Stella Kowalski.. Frances Heflin
Stanley Kowalski..... Gerald O'Loughlin
Mitch..... Rudy Bond
Steve Hubbell..... Bruno Damon
Sailor..... David Anthony
Blanche DuBois..... Tallulah Bankhead
Pablo Gonzales..... Lou Gilbert
A Young Collector..... Sandy Campbell
Mexican Woman... Edna Thomas
A Strange Woman.. Dorritt Kelton
A Strange Man.... Bert Bertram

New York World-Telegram and The Sun
February 16, 1956

Tallulah Brilliant In 'Streetcar' Role

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Tallulah Bankhead did something last night nobody in the history of the world has ever done before.

As Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" at the City Center, she plucked triumph out of a miasma of disaster. Recall her awhile ago, a great international theater star of drama. Think how in radio and television, for a good living, she added millions of new hearts to the old ones, and entrenched herself in all of them as an uninhibited clown.

To the world, from being a unique artist, she had high-dived into fame as a personality.

Complex, Tricky, Demanding.

Last night, she chose to climb back up to her old niche in the most complex, tricky and demanding role in modern dramatic literature.

She had been contemptibly prejudged in public print for her effort. Nor was she aided by an element of adoring saboteurs in the premiere audience, who could not wait to guffaw at any suggestion of the Legend, as distinguished from the Actress.

Miss Bankhead employed a superhuman degree of taste, restraint and control. What she delivered was one of the most extraordinarily shattering performances of our time.

Only once did sly, forced laughter elude her grip. It was oddly at one of the drama's most innocent passages, about the Pleiades. And the star wisely let it run its course. Never again was she out of splendid control.

Miss Bankhead's Blanche is so clear that it sometimes seems indecent to watch and listen. As no other actress has ever done, the star understands what it means to be a Southern Lady, without any regard whatsoever for immediate circumstances.

The sequence with the young bill collector drew the breath of a nervous giggle, but it inspired more tears. The long passage relating Blanche's tragic young marriage, held the big Center audience in suspended animation.

Never Before.

With the final terrifying chapter, one realizes that Blanche, through Bankhead, has gained a decadence, tenderness and shining physical beauty that she never had before.

One can only be amazed at the way the star edits her own experience for her performance. Nobody could accuse Miss Bankhead of defencelessness. Yet the vulnerability of Blanche is realized in hypersensitive fashion, from the play's first moment.

In all truth, it is hard to remember much of the other actors. Frances Heflin is honest and simple as the sister. Gerald O'Loughlin is threatening as Stanley, Rudy Bond is a sincere Mitch. What they lack is the restrained vitality and the swing of cresendo with which Miss Bankhead incomparably imbues the drama.

New York Post

February 16, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Tallulah Bankhead in 'Streetcar'

There are many things that can and will be said concerning Tallulah Bankhead's portrayal of Blanche DuBois in the revival of Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire," which opened last night at the City Center. But I think it possesses several virtues that cannot be denied.

It is a compelling and dynamic performance that rivets the attention at all times and, in the end, commands considerable respect. And it never gets out of hand. Those who had either hoped or feared that Miss Bankhead would turn a tragedy into a farce soon learned of their mistake.

There is no doubt, either, that many in last night's audience, whether they were among the star's admirers or detractors, had come there for laughter. All they needed was their cue, and, at first, they seemed sure they had received it. Miss Bankhead's chief recent fame has been as a comedienne, with the result that her entrance was regarded as a signal for mirth and her first speeches were greeted with hilarity. There were occasional later points in the evening when serious lines were taken as comic, but it soon became clear that a real characterization was being offered.

This, in itself, represents quite a triumph for Miss Bankhead. And it is right that this should be so, because she offers a performance that has very definite merits. It possesses power in abundance, for here is an actress who is not only unafraid to tear a passion to tatters, but knows how to do so when the occasion demands it. When the City Center's Blanche DuBois is turning on her once idealistic but now demanding suitor, Mitch, she goes at him with a vehemence that is pretty awe-inspiring, and there was never a Blanche who has gone mad with more authority.

On the other hand, there are qualities in the performance that struck me as less commendable. Excellent actress though she is, Miss Bankhead finds it much easier to be commanding than to seem lost, pitiful and appealing, and, while Blanche's crack-up is made explicit and believable, it is never deeply moving and only in the last scene does it really achieve an emotion that approaches the tragic. Tenderness is hardly a trait that Miss Bankhead goes in for, and, while her portrayal is likely to fascinate you, it is far less apt to break your heart.

As you may have guessed from the space I have devoted to her acting, Miss Bankhead has rather turned Mr. Williams' play into a vehicle, which may not be altogether a good idea. But, if the star performance seemed what was of primary importance last night, the basic quality of "A Streetcar Named Desire" nevertheless came through, if a trifle underemphasized, and it was once more evident that Tennessee Williams has written a drama of pity and cruelty that brings his quality of dark poetry to a realistic theme in one of the finest works of the recent American theater.

There is also a character in the play named Stanley Kowalski, you may remember, and I thought Gerald O'Loughlin, the young actor who now has the role, captured his animal brutality effectively, even if he possibly had his mind fixed on Marlon Brando a little too steadily. Frances Heflin, an excellent actress, portrays the married sister with skill and sympathy, and Rudy Bond has the right quality for Mitch, the unfortunate fellow who wanted to marry Blanche. There is much in Miss Bankhead's performance to quibble about, but she remains fascinating to watch.

Journal-American

February 16, 1956

Tallu Gives A Sunday Try

She's Thoughtful and Vibrant In Tennessee Williams Revival

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE "STREETCAR" is back and Tallulah's got it. As another offering in the City Center's midwinter season of drama, Miss Bankhead opened last night in the Tennessee Williams perennial involving a trolley called "Desire," and it is gratifying to report that she may recoup some of the civic loot lost through the misfortune of Orson ("No Legs") Welles and his ill-starred production of "King Lear."

For Tallulah gives this one the Sunday try. She is not always capable of being anything but Tallulah, but she has rolled up her sleeves and plunged into the part with both fists.

There were times, opening night, when her familiar diction brought laughs at unexpected intervals, but the performance can be regarded generally as thoughtful and vibrant. Her delineation of the frayed schoolteacher is always compelling, visually exact.

Less Happy

It seemed to me that Gerald O'Loughlin, as Steve Kowalski, had a less happy evening. Maybe it's harder to follow Marlon Brando than most of us imagine, for the fact seems to be that disaster lies in the path of a straight imitator.

Herbert Machiz, who directed, apparently coached Mr. O'Loughlin along the pattern of the Brando interpretation and the effect was not always convincing. Steve must be a primitive and earthy character, relying on straight animal appeal to win his audience,—a chore delicately beyond the pale of noise and flamboyant gestures.

Frances Heflin, as Stella, gave a straightforward and literate contribution, and Rudy Bond was appropriately fumbling and bewildered as Mitch. Watson Barratt provided what seemed to be an exact duplicate of the original Jo Mielziner set.

Through no fault of the players or the production I thought "Streetcar Named Desire" suffered somehow through the passage of time. Perhaps we've had too many people, including Tennessee Williams, trying to write like Tennessee Williams, many of them with little success.

At least there is a reminiscent quality to many of the scenes, much of the speech. The power is there—he's still the old master of that—but we've seen these people so much lately that they're beginning to cloy.

This, obviously, is no reflection on the author, and the play remains a modern monument of sorts. It deserves a visit—at least to determine what so much latter-day writing has been shooting at.

Daily Mirror

February 16, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Streetcar' Rolls Again With Talu at Helm

• City Center play subordinated by surge of histrionics.

Several seasons ago, Tennessee Williams penned a neurotic number titled "A Streetcar Named Desire." It was about a psychopathic Southern belle tossed into a snake pit. She got there because her husband was a misfit, and her brother-in-law a beast.

Blanche DuBois was a fragile flower. She assumed the proportions of a great lady to hide her shady past. But nasty-minded Stanley Kowalski, needled by her fancy airs, dug up the dirt and broke her on the rack. It was all just as though the enlightened Henry Fielding had never tried to put an end to the baiting of lunatics in Bedlam.

WE THOUGHT "Streetcar," on the whole, a rather dreary dramatic exercise. With so much of moment in the world to explore, we couldn't see spending an evening with brutes bent on beating the daylights out of well-meaning dullards. Even though they did it in pseudo-poetic terms.

However, there were those who thought otherwise. So many of them, in fact, that Maestro Williams' fame and fortunes were vastly increased. Which was quite all right by us. But we were, and still are, of the opinion that if trapped in a Kowalski household, we'd leave peacefully after five minutes, if possible, and by force, if necessary.

An amazing thing happened at the City Center Wednesday evening. A fascinating figure, one Tallulah Bankhead, turned in the neatest trick of the season. She took the first act of "Streetcar," and kidded the pants off it. She satirized it unmercifully, stimulating gales of laughter among the discerning first-nighters.

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BUT SHE PLAYED the second stanza as though she were Sarah Siddons leveling with Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. She turned on her powers in a devastating display of virtuosity. She wasn't the frail femme known as Blanche DuBois. Rather was she the terrific Talu bent on spellbinding an audience. And, believe us, there were no laughs in this canto.

Well, that's the trouble with the current revival of "Streetcar" at the City Center. La Bankhead is bringing the grand manner to a minor play. She's overwhelming it with versatility and resource. She's throwing its dubious values completely out of key with her brilliant and undisciplined histrionics.

We'd like to see Gerald O'Loughlin, the Stanley Kowalski in this instance, under more felicitious circumstances. He impressed us as being a first-rate actor. We know that Frances Heflin, the current Stella Kowalski, is a good actress. And we have seen Rudy Bond, who impersonates Mitch, to advantage in the past.

But everyone on stage was so overshadowed by the dynamic Bankhead on a dramatic binge, that it is difficult to assess their individual contributions. This is a "Streetcar" such as you have zily along on rattling rails, and gives you a heck of a hair-raising ride for your money.

New York Herald Tribune

February 16, 1956

THEATER

'A Streetcar Named Desire'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN SPITE of the fact that Tallulah Bankhead is giving a far from satisfactory performance in "A Streetcar Named Desire," I think my respect for the lady has increased.

She was up against two insurmountable obstacles at City Center Wednesday night. One of them was the audience. It was determined that she live up to her roustabout reputation, insistent that she blast Tennessee Williams' best play into a thousand low-comedy fragments.

Miss Bankhead had but to scurry—en negligee—down that familiar spiral staircase to send a wave of expectant titters through the house. She had only to sigh and say "I want a rest" to raise it to chuckles. Any random remark about needing a drink turned immediately into a boffola, a line about the Pleiades ("those girls can't be out tonight") drew what amounted to manufactured television applause, and I'm sure the explosion that greeted a light sally in French must have been heard all the way down at Circle-in-the-Square.

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Advance reports that the star was having her own irresponsible way with an utterly helpless work of art had been circulated, and the horde of first-nighters—or at least a substantial segment of that horde—was gleefully alert for promised indiscretions.

In point of fact, Miss Bankhead was doing nothing of the sort. Indeed, I think she was doing her level best to sink that fabled reputation into the broken and self-pitying private terrors of the character called Blanche du Bois.

The mocking bleat is kept as close as possible to an aspriate, the knowing eye is given almost no workout at all. With her trembling hands tightly clasped, her chin ducked low, and her knees sagging in fatigue as she stumbles into one of the drearier New Orleans tenements, the actress indicates from the outset that she would like to play the part—as written.

And there are three or four times in the second act when it is played with the tenacity, and the jungle honesty, of a tigress. As Miss Bankhead stares at an absurdly youthful newspaper boy, just stares at him and repeats "young, young, young" in a despairing rhythm, the exact abandon of a lost soul is sounded. When she gets to her feet and drives her way into the past and the remembered agonies of a hopeless marriage, she may adopt some postures suitable to "Phedre" but the crack in the voice is real. And the animal scream with which she drives a disillusioned lover into the noisy night is hair-raising in the way that it ought to be hair-raising. Mr. Williams' play is a play of fiery substance, and Miss Bankhead knows where at least some of that substance is located.

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We must come, though, to that second insurmountable obstacle, and it is the plain fact that the actress is miscast—not because she is notoriously a comedienne but because she is, as a person and as a performer, notoriously indestructible. Blanche du Bois is a girl who deceives herself. There is no self-deceit anywhere in Miss Bankhead.

She is a woman patently wise in the ways of the world, obviously without illusions of the sort called for throughout the play; she is shrewd and sharp and no one to tangle with. Try as she will, she cannot disguise the fact that she is candid. And the attempt to disguise it—by letting her sentences float off into the breeze, by never striking a period, by babbling hastily through the more affected passages—simply ends in monotony. The pretentious side of a complicated girl is never brought to the surface at all, the little literary conceits ("why, they're yellow with antiquity") come out straight and flat, and the irritated Stanley Kowalski is left with very little to be irritated about. The play does not collapse into comedy; barring those three or four good scenes, it just stretches into an extended and not very meaningful chase.

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The supporting company is, let's say, adequate. Frances Heflin's Stella is properly spirited, Rudy Bond's Mitch is reasonably appealing, and if Gerald O'Loughlin's brutish Stanley possesses no special sting it is insolent enough—in its hangdog way—to push the one-sided plot along.

Miss Bankhead does not really ask for those hoots she gets. She asks for something better, and if she is not the person to define this particular role, she deserves to be listened to on her own urgent terms.

DAILY NEWS

February 16, 1956

Miss Bankhead Makes a Novelty Out of 'Streetcar Named Desire'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

By the force of her personality, and quite apart from her considerable skill as an actress, Tallulah Bankhead has made a novelty out of almost every play she has appeared in. She made a novelty of Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" last evening at the City Center Theatre. My interest in it as a curio was high but my estimate of it as a drama is only moderate.

Miss Bankhead could have horsed around in this moody and tender play about a Louisiana Hatrack and made it a freakish one-woman show—but she doesn't make the slightest attempt in this direction. She treats the Williams work with respect and great earnestness. But, valiant though she is, Miss Bankhead can't quite manage to be the troubled and tremulous nymph whom the author created. She just isn't vocally equipped to quaver. She is better endowed by nature to have replaced Orson Welles as King Lear, rather than Jessica Tandy or Uta Hagen as Blanche DuBois.

Audience No Help

Last night's audience, which was notably and perhaps inexplicably epicene, was no great help to the star, for it had come prepared to laugh—and "Streetcar" is no comedy. The audience wasn't laughing at Miss Bankhead; it was laughing with her and following her closely, but it was laughing in the wrong places. Frequently it seemed to think that something tender and pitiable was meant to be a joke. The sense of humor of the interior decorating set is odd, I think.

Miss Bankhead's supporting cast is, on the other hand, a great help, for the performances are generally first-rate. Gerald O'Loughlin, making his Broadway debut, does an admirable piece of work as Stanley Kowalski—the role that made Marlon Brando the U. S. Male. Frances Heflin gives another steady and true performance as Stanley's wife, and there is another very good impersonation by Rudy Bond as the bashful Mitch.

As a play, though, "Streetcar" now strikes me as being a less exalted work than I thought it was when it was first performed.

"Someone Waiting"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 15, 1956

'Someone Waiting' at Golden

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A season or so ago Emlyn Williams wrote a chronicle of revenge called "Someone Waiting," and played it to unsensational success in London and the provinces.

Now the play, which must be classed as a mystery, is at the John Golden Theater with Leo G. Carroll in the principal role of a seedy gentleman whose son has been wrongly convicted of murder and executed.

Along about the same time he must have been writing this Williams was doing some brilliant recitations of Dickens. The Victorian novelist definitely affected his creative instincts.

"Someone Waiting" has enough plot for not one but several of Dickens' mammoth serials. In fact there are enough switches and changes on the theme here to provide a 20-volume set of Nick Carter or "The Gray Seal."

Hints and More Hints.

One is occasionally led to believe that the dead boy's best friend actually killed a phony-sounding Swedish girl. Other times one suspects that the friend's father is top candidate, and finally that his mother is The One.

First the secretary is due to be wiped out, too. Then the maid. A strong if silent pressure is felt, to promote the elimination of the dead boy's friend.

But none of these characters is faintly believable. And the red herrings are so rosy, so fishy and so numerous that it is very hard to care whether the Old Man gets his Revenge or not.

The finale is a letdown. After pseudo ingenuity has been lavished all over the plot the end is purely physical and spontaneous. It simply stops the play without solving it.

Mr. Williams has suddenly, when it is far too late, tried to switch from a madly intricate plot to a character study.

Carroll Efficient.

Mr. Carroll seems so busy just keeping up with twists in narrative that rush on around him that he can give the central figure little warmth or charm. His characterization is efficient, without much pulse.

Jessie Royce Landis makes a somewhat bellicose figure of the grandly airy lady of the house and Howard St. John neatly conceals whatever embarrassment he must feel at having to rush after every likely looking female who crosses his path.

Robert Hardy plays the dead boy's friend, a weak and unpleasant role, which he frequently drives to the edge of hysterics, then saves by tactical control.

Norah Howard briefly lends the play its most amusing, credible flesh and blood. She is a practical mother, out to see her daughters get their just deserts. Ludie Claire is a sleek, alluring secretary and Brook Byron suggests that backstairs in Britain know elements of startling pulchritude.

"SOMEONE WAITING"

Play by Emlyn Williams; staged by Allan Davis; setting and lighting by Ben Edwards; costumes by Gene Coffin; presented by Eddie Rich at the John Golden Theatre, February 14, 1956. The cast:

John Nedlow.... Howard St. John
Miss Lennie.....Ludie Claire
Martin.....Robert Hardy
Vera Nedlow.....
Jessie Royce Landis
Hilda.....Brook Byron
Fenn.....Leo G. Carroll
Mrs. Danecourt...Norah Howard
A Neighbor.....Herbert Voland
His Wife..... Louise Buckley

DAILY NEWS

February 15, 1956

'Someone Waiting' Neat Meller

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As an actor, Emlyn Williams is impeccable—as he was when he impersonated Charles Dickens in his one-man show. As a playwright, Mr. Williams has an admirably tidy mind . . . and a very tricky one. He obeys all the rules of good manners and logic, but is a slippery devil all the same. His new play, "Someone Waiting," which was presented last evening at the John Golden Theatre, is a drama of murder and revenge which stretches suspense from the first moments of the first act to the final line of the third act. It is not as flashy a job as "Witness for the Prosecution," but to me it is at least as soundly wrought. As an addict of the psychological thriller, I had a fine time last evening wondering who, if anybody, was going to get killed.

I also had a fine time watching the performances of the players. Here was Leo G. Carroll, as tidy and slippery an actor as we've got, playing a mild-mannered teacher with murder on his mind. Here was Jessie Royce Landis, playing an upper-class Englishwoman who has a secret knowledge of another murder. It was fine to see these two actors working, for like sensible people in a melodrama they build slowly and save the acting climax for the end. It also was enjoyable to see Robert Hardy, a newcomer from England, as an overwrought youth who has his own ideas about who killed whom.

Motive Is Revenge

I can let you in on the beginning of the play. Howard St. John is a stuffy English motor magnate with an evil look to him, and he is married to Miss Landis. They have adopted and brought up Hardy. Hardy is a problem boy. He has failed in his law exams and he hates his adopted father. He also is upset because his best friend has just been hanged for murdering a servant girl in this very apartment, and he thinks his friend was innocent.

So in comes Carroll, with gentle good manners and a baffled look, as the new tutor hired to get the boy through the law exams next time. He is, one soon learns, the father of the boy who was unjustly hanged for murder. He has come here to administer justice all by himself to whoever it was in this house who really did the killing.

You can take it from there by going to the John Golden Theatre. Before the evening is over you will find that you have been misled several times—but never dishonestly, for playwright Williams has his tidy mind and is an honorable trickster. And if you can guess beforehand what will happen at play's end you are smarter than I am.

Allan Davis has directed the drama and Ben Edwards has made a pleasant London setting for it.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 15, 1956

THEATER

'Someone Waiting'

By WALTER F. KERR

THERE'S one thing I can tell you about the new thriller that opened at the Golden Theater Tuesday night, and that is who done it. Emlyn Williams done it. But why?

Well, I guess I know why. Author Williams is a very kindly man, with a soft spot in his heart for all those people who like neat little murder puzzles in which telltale letters slip out of long dusty lawbooks, in which stealthy characters in bathrobes turn down the lights at least once an act, and in which a perfectly planned crime is temporarily fouled up by the unexpected arrival of a lady who sits down, lights a cigarette, and speaks Cockney.

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He has had—no doubt about it—a most humanitarian service in mind, and those of us who really relish neckties used as nooses and all that splendid nonsense about the purloined fountain-pen should be grateful to him for the remembrance on St. Valentine's Day. But, as the principal characters in "Someone Waiting" keep saying over and over again, "Now, see here. Wait a minute."

Isn't there a rule that says people like to be fooled by melodrama all of the time, but that they have to be able to believe it some of the time?

"Someone Waiting" starts right off with the least likely juvenile we've seen in some time. It's not that he lolls about with his feet on the sofa, or hates his father and mother (he's adopted, actually). It's that he keeps twisting his mouth all the time, shaking his hair loose so that it falls over his face, and generally behaving as though he'd really wanted a part in "Tamburlaine."

We are next introduced to Mr. Howard St. John, normally an excellent actor but here required to play a pretty shifty character pretty shiftily. You know from the way his eyes dart restlessly about the room, and the slightly shaky way he waves a cigar into his face, that he's been up to no good. His wife, played by the equally expert Jessie Royce Landis, is every bit as upset. A soul can't say "Good morning" to her without setting her fidgety fingers to rapping a tattoo on that bracelet, and a sudden "Boo!" I'm afraid, would have had her spilling the beans in Act One.

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Enter Leo G. Carroll, as a law tutor who is really the disguised father of a boy sent to death by some one in this room, and the tremors quiet down a bit. Mr. Carroll is a subdued and quite sensible actor (even if he does have to shake his own hair down over his face in the third act) and for patches of the enterprise he uses his wry, deadpan, almost ventriloquial calm to good effect. Mr. Carroll has the permanent mien of a startled bird-watcher, and as he vaguely sneaks a forbidden drink for his pupil or gently works out a trap for the man he has come to catch, he seems very urbane indeed.

But urbanity—and a certain gay urbanity might have made the whole thing foolishly entertaining—is one quality that "Someone Waiting" cannot hold onto for long.

The author bears down on the transparent clue too hard and too often for that. "Hmmm," these domestic sleuths like to say, "It's a parquet floor. They heard you coming." Then meaningful glances are exchanged, while the audience moseys three steps ahead. There is quite a primitive discussion of which of five possible desk drawers makes the right kind of noise—I'm afraid they all sounded remarkably similar to me—and the number of fingers snapped in midair as quite obvious discoveries are made had best not be counted. Truth to tell, the machinery of Mr. Williams' spider web creaks noisily as it spins, and the principal character's belated confession that he has never managed to bring *anything* off does not make its awkwardness legitimate.

Nor has Allan Davis' notably stagey staging helped matters along. The victims of the piece tend to get drunk too cooperatively, go to sleep too rapidly, and—when they are standing erect with martinis in their hands—enunciate too portentously for anything like simple belief.

When Leo Carroll is complimented on his apparent good health, he submits his recipe: "Have a purpose and enjoy your work. Plan a murder." I'm in favor of the purpose and the plan, but I just didn't enjoy the work.

The New York Times
February 15, 1956

Theatre: Too-Ingenious Crime Case

Melodrama, 'Someone Waiting,' at Golden

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EMLYN WILLIAMS has written a crime play too ingenious for its own good.

"Someone Waiting," he calls it. Leo G. Carroll and Jesse Royce Landis appeared in it at the John Golden last evening. At the end of three acts Mr. Carroll, playing the part of a meek tutor, succeeds in tracking down a murderer and doing something conspicuously noble. Since the criminal code of the County of New York enjoins a drama critic from revealing solutions to mystery melodramas, you will never know how heroic Mr. Carroll can be unless you devote a full evening to watching him.

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Watching him is no privation. He usually plays the parts of bloodless, precise little gentlemen with exquisite manners, soft voices and dazzling intellects. On this occasion he is a colorless tutor who is the father of a boy just hanged for having murdered a Swedish hussy. The tutor suspects that his son was not guilty. Thanks to Mr. Williams' ingenuity, the tutor gets a teaching job in the household of the man who did, in fact, commit the murder but managed to conceal his guilt. The tutor sets about the job of avenging the monstrous wrong that has been done to his son.

It is always fun watching Mr. Carroll triumphing over injustice. Dressed in beautifully fitting pants that do not match his careless jacket, his tie neatly knotted, he looks gratifyingly ascetic and plans his revenge with no visible excitement. Mild as his manners may be, Mr. Carroll has an audacious spirit.

Leo G. Carroll, Jessie Royce Landis Star

But last evening your correspondent could not help dreaming wistfully of a terrifying melodrama, called "Angel Street," in which Mr. Carroll's soft style of acting was triumphant. There was a hat in the play that Mr. Carroll apparently had forgotten to remove from the stage at a critical moment in the life of every member of the audience. He padded gently back on the stage to recover it just in time. The relief was terrific. Same theatre, too.

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While Mr. Williams was meticulously perfecting every detail in his play last evening, it was also permissible to dream wistfully of a gooseflesh thriller he once wrote and entitled "Night Must Fall." "Someone Waiting" is ingeniously planned, too. It keeps Miss Landis making imposing entrances and exits and behaving magnificently.

It requires Howard St. John to simulate a dreadful man of the world who is particularly unscrupulous about women. It presents Robert Hardy as a craven young man who has a finer nature than you might suspect from his boorish behavior in the first scene.

But "Someone Waiting" is so ingenious that it is hard to believe, most things in life being less perfect. Even Mr. Carroll's immaculate sense of style cannot rescue it from dullness.

Journal-American
February 15, 1956

Whodunit? Who Cares!

'Switch' Ending Acceptable, But Play Isn't Very Plausible

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT IS generally considered a sneaky and unethical thing to tell the customers too much about a thriller like "Someone Waiting," the Emlyn Williams play which opened at the John Golden Theatre last night. So I will just tell enough to get you good and confused, which is what I was.

It seems there are these people in England, a rich bloke and his wife, and they have a rather sinister adopted son. Well, a Swedish girl has been found dead in their apartment and the best friend of the sinister son has been charged with her murder, convicted and hanged. That's where we come in.

After we've been there a little while we begin to think that maybe the sinister son is pretty suspicious. Then along comes a fellow who has been hired as a tutor for the son and, what do you know? It turns out that he is none other than the father of the boy who has just been executed for the murder.

Even a Letter

So it is only natural that he and the son get together and figure out how the real murderer is no less a person than the rich bloke. They even have a letter to prove it.

This is the juncture at which most of us would have picked up the phone and called the police and had the rich bloke arrested, but of course this would have brought the curtain down at the end of Act One and most of the customers would have felt cheated, so the tutor has a better idea: he is going to murder the rich bloke himself.

I will not detain you longer with the particulars of how he intends to achieve this, or what goes wrong, but it is only fair to report that Mr. Williams has contrived a very acceptable "switch" ending. What he hasn't contrived, in my opinion, is a very plausible play.

He has ensnarled his household in such a web of convenient motivation that by the beginning of the last act even the stage hands are suspect. The whole thing is enormously complex, and the time comes when you cease to care.

2 Stand Out

All this is in spite of a couple of dominant performances by Leo G. Carroll, as the tutor, and Jessie Royce Landis, as the wife of the wealthy Londoner. Mr. Carroll comes very close to making one believe that he would resort to the play's complicated revenge, and Miss Landis projects the proper sense of nervous agitation induced by her singular situation. But there are moments when it seemed to me they'd have both been thankful for a more detailed road map to guide them.

Howard St. John is a perfectly abominable rich bloke, and Robert Hardy is a real sinister adopted son, with the proper suggestion of atonement toward the end.

Brook Byron, Norah Howard and Ludie Claire scored in support.

I was disappointed in "Someone Waiting." It is carefully cast and mounted; the elements of a good shocker are there. But I wound up not caring whodunit.